

January 7, 2008
Milwaukee Police Chief Edward A. Flynn
Oath of Office Ceremony Remarks

Mayor Barrett, Council President Hines, and Chairman Sobczak: thank you for your kind words. Thank you for the confidence you have expressed in me. I will not let you down.

2008 will be an historic year. Certainly that is what the candidates for president are all promising. They also all proclaim that they will bring “change” and that they are in favor of “change.” In my experience, being in favor of change is a little like being in favor of gravity. Change will come, whether or not you favor it. The only constant in life is change. The question is how will we respond to inevitable change? The problems of society change in degree and magnitude. The problems of a city change in scope and seriousness. The responsibility for those of us in city government is to anticipate, respond to, and mitigate the negative aspects of change while facilitating and encouraging positive change.

In police work, the more things change the more, in some ways, they remain the same. Although the challenges the police must confront change, our fundamental responsibilities do not. In 1829, Robert Peel, the father of modern policing, stated, “the basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder.” The types of crime may change over time. The types of public disorder the police must manage may change over the years. Nonetheless, our responsibility is, no matter what the historical epoch or geographic location to prevent crime and disorder. To those two fundamental purposes of the police a third must also be added, to reduce the level of fear in a community.

I expect the Milwaukee Police Department to be organized and focused on accomplishing that basic mission. We shall reduce the levels of fear, crime and disorder in the City of Milwaukee. Our measure of success will not be the number arrests. Our measure of success will not be the number of traffic citations issues. Our measure of success will not be our response time to non-emergency calls. Our measures of success will be the reduction of crime, fear and disorder in Milwaukee.

To accomplish our mission, we will embrace a community-based, problem-oriented, data-driven policing strategy that emphasizes beat integrity, geographic accountability, the use of problem-solving techniques and a reliance on data to identify threats, measure the results of our interventions, and to hold ourselves accountable; to each other and to our community.

It is often said in police agencies that patrol is the backbone. Yet too often police departments act like patrol is the expendable resource, made up of call-answerers and report takers, while the real police work is done by special units. That has to change. We’re not report takers. We’re the police. Every member of this agency, and every unit in this agency, will be judged on what their contribution is to our core mission. We will focus on the Districts. It is there that the many communities that make up Milwaukee are

located. It is there that the unique needs and priorities of our communities must be handled. Our local commanders and their officers are those in closest touch with the needs of those neighborhoods. The rest of the department must, and will, support those critical efforts.

To the command staff and supervisory officers of the Milwaukee Police Department, I commit myself to empowering you and developing your potential as leaders. I believe responsibility must be accompanied by sufficient authority to accomplish the mission. I believe in the principles of delegation and accountability. I foster an environment in which responsible risk-taking on behalf of the public good is encouraged and supported. I believe firmly that the police department does not exist to avoid mistakes; it exists to accomplish something important.

What I expect in return is your focus on the mission and on the needs of those for whom you are responsible. You are responsible for the safety of this community. You are also responsible for the performance of your people and for meeting their legitimate needs. Your officers need to know how they are doing, they need to know willful incompetence will not be ignored, good work will be recognized, and honest mistakes will be dealt with differently than misconduct. They need to know you care about them and for them and do all you can to help them succeed in our mission. I also expect your best advice and for that advice to be about the future of this department and this city, not your career. I have very little patience with office politics, rival factions or cliques. Your first and only loyalty must be to this city.

To the officers of the Milwaukee Police Department, I commit myself to do all that I can to see that you are properly trained, equipped, supervised and supported. I believe in you. I believe you became police officers because you sought moral clarity and wanted to make a difference in people's lives and the life of your city. I pledge to you to foster an environment worthy of the idealism that brought you to us. I recognize that police work is hard and that it can be emotionally debilitating. I know about the frustrations of the work and the constant risk of demoralizing cynicism. But I also know that our work has meaning. If anyone lives a purpose-driven life, it is a police officer. The greatest antidote to cynicism is a sense of accomplishment, accompanied by community support and acceptance. You also need to believe that your opinion about how to accomplish our mission matters. You are closer to the work than anyone in the organization. If this department can successfully draw on your energy, your commitment, and your ideas, we will accomplish great things. I pledge to you that we will create an environment where you feel like you matter.

What I expect in return from you is integrity, courage, competence, commitment, compassion, restraint, and respect, for your department, yourself, each other and your community. I expect you to be leaders. You are as responsible for the morale and reputation of this department as I am. You must be the custodians of the honor of policing. I not only expect you to refrain from misconduct, I expect you to prevent it. Too often, we in the police are defined by our worst examples, not our best. Every act of misconduct undermines respect for everyone who wears a badge and for the rule of law.

If you want to save a colleague's job, and protect your own reputation you must act. By the time it gets to me, it will already be too late, for your colleague and for our reputation.

To the community, I promise an open, accountable, accessible police department responsive to your concerns. It is my hope that, someday, support for the department will be uniformly strong across every neighborhood and from every sector of society. I hope someday that all of our communities will be willing to suspend judgment when there is a critical incident until all the facts are in. But I recognize that we are not there yet. This police department and all its communities have a history and that history has not always been positive. We will work to learn from that history and not be held hostage to it. We will work to earn your trust. Reducing crime, fear, and disorder in your neighborhood while treating you with dignity and respect will be our down payment on earning that trust.

What I expect in return is for every neighborhood to understand that public safety is not a spectator sport. Safe neighborhoods are the result of people and their police working together to create communities capable of sustaining civic life. We have a mutual obligation to do our respective parts. The Milwaukee Police Department will use every tool at its disposal to create safe places. But you must do your part. We can control crime; we cannot control your child. We can take down criminals. We cannot raise your children. We can seize drugs, guns and money, but we can't ask your child when he comes home how he could afford those new clothes. Too many inevitable homicides are termed tragedies when, in fact, they were inevitabilities; the inevitable result of immature bad choices and disengaged parenting.

It is said that, "it takes a village to raise a child." Well, our villages are failing. I believe an effective police department can help "raise villages" but only those who live in that "village," that neighborhood, can raise that child. To all of you who, every day, try to do just that, with your own child or the children of others in your care, we will do all we can to make their streets safe for them.

I am in a new political environment. It will take time for me to understand it and learn to navigate it. But I want all of those who operate in that environment that I assume good will. I believe that our goals for this city are the same. I suspect from time to time we will have our disagreements about means but not ends. I will be an advocate for the needs of the department. I will advocate for it in city hall, at the state house, and in Washington, D.C. But I know we do not function in a vacuum, I know many worthy services find themselves competing for scarce resources. I pledge that I will manage the resources provided by you to the department prudently and will take your needs, issues and concerns seriously while endeavoring to respond to them appropriately.

In return, I expect your support for our efforts and a true partnership with us as we work together to overcome the city's challenges. I look forward to close and productive relationships with the mayor, the common council, the fire and police commission, the District Attorney, the City Attorney, and the Sheriff. I have been impressed by the caliber

of the people who have devoted themselves to public life here in Milwaukee and look forward to working with them.

Daunting challenges lay before us. I have confidence in this community and in its cops. Together, we will achieve great things. Change is coming. It's coming fast. And it's inevitable. We're in this together. Let's get to work.

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